

SHAPING FUTURES OF PRISON INMATES AND FORMER PRISONERS VIA HIGHER EDUCATION: A CONCEPTUAL STUDY ON SOCIAL RETURN ON INVESTMENT ASSESSMENT FOR STAKEHOLDERS

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ABSTRACT

Companies largely play a role in corporate social responsibility (CSR) programmes by engaging with stakeholders including employees, customers, investors, communities and suppliers for financial, environmental and/or social impacts. Contribution quantum is rarely assessed or calculated when it concerns CSR as it is explicitly recognised as the willingness of an organisation to contribute to the community within the ethical norms of charity although strategically CSR can increase revenues by decreasing risks and costs. This study highlights the unique contributions of various stakeholders who wish to make positive and sustainable impact on the socially challenged community – the prisoners. One such engagement is the provision of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes for prisoners in selected Malaysian prisons by Open University Malaysia (OUM), with the partnership of the Prisons Department of Malaysia. It is an economic empowerment programme to rehabilitate and educate its inmates and create employment opportunities if and when they are released. Social Return On Investment (SROI) is a method for measuring and communicating values that incorporates social, environmental and economic impacts to stakeholders. It is an accounting of value created by the activities and the contributions that made the activity possible. Results will be expressed in a ratio of total benefits (a sum of all the outcomes) to total investments (a sum of all costs involved). The purpose of this conceptual study is to calculate the ratio of Ringgit Malaysia (RM) of social value created for every RM1 spent on its activities. Inmates who are accepted into OUM's programmes attend face-to-face tutorials conducted by OUM tutors and sit for examinations in the prison. They are supported by OUM's online learning management system where they manage their studies, submit their assignments and access the digital library.

Keywords: *Access to Education, Open and Distance Learning, Social Return On Investment*

INTRODUCTION

The Malaysian government has permitted the Department of Prisons to start tertiary education for prisoners in an effort to provide tertiary education to prison inmates and equip them with knowledge and skills to pursue work after their release. OUM is the authorised tertiary education provider in these prisons where it conducts undergraduate and postgraduate degree programmes for inmates. A total of 67 respondents comprising 63 prisoners and 4 ex-inmates are involved in this programme. This study aims to calculate the ratio of Ringgit Malaysia (RM) of social value created for every RM1 spent on tertiary education programmes in prisons in Malaysia using the Social Return on Investment (SROI) method. OUM and the Prisons Department and all other stakeholders will be able to put a RM value to this CSR programme. For example, a ratio of 10:1 indicates that an investment of RM1 delivers RM10 of social value. SROI contains more information than the ROI, which is the financial measure. SROI helps us to understand how change is being created by evaluating social, environmental and economic outcomes. Change here refers to the change produced by the CSR programme in terms of relevance to stakeholders; ie the people or organisations that experience or contribute to it. OUM and other stakeholders can now measure, understand and communicate the value of this CSR programme.

Problem Statement

Former prisoners' education and the extent and nature of previous work experience should be the main predictors of post-release employment outcomes as these indicators of human capital are important criteria for employers seeking valuable and dependable workers (Sabol, 2007; Western, 2007). Some individuals exiting prison may find work with previous employers or in occupations that require few skills or limited customer contact (Holzer et al., 2007). Holzer and his colleagues (2004; Holzer, Raphael, & Stoll 2006a, 2006b) have used employer survey data to analyse employers' decisions to hire individuals with criminal records. In employer surveys administered to over 3,000 employers in the United States of America, roughly 60% of employers would "probably not" hire applicants with criminal records.

Given that most incarcerated people will eventually re-join society, prison education is a great way to rehabilitate and prepare them for life after their release. If an inmate leaves with the same skills he had before entering prison, it is highly likely that he will take up his old law-breaking activities. This is something we must think about in ensuring that higher education is truly available for all, even to those confined within prison walls.

Provide an integrated rehabilitation programme to all residents on the basis of the Human Development Plan of the Prison Department.

~ Cited from Malaysia's Prison Department's Charter

By giving education to the inmates, you are protecting your own civilization, your own society. The fewer people you have running around with no hope, no education, no means of support and no reason to feel proud of themselves, the lower the risk to you: both to your values and to your stuff. You do not have to be a bleeding heart liberal to see that.

~ Cited from Psychology Today

Inmates who are accepted into OUM's programmes attend face-to-face tutorials conducted by OUM tutors in the prison. It is an economic empowerment programme to rehabilitate and educate its inmates and create employment opportunities if and when they are released. The social return on investment (SROI) in these programmes will be assessed and evaluated.

This study highlights the unique contributions of various stakeholders who wish to make positive and sustainable impact on the socially challenged community: the prisoners. The prison authorities, Open University Malaysia and its tutors, the government of Malaysia, parents and families of inmates and ex-inmates are the stakeholders investigated. The study specifically analyses the social value, environmental value and economic impact gained as a result of providing tertiary education to prison inmates. Results are expressed in a ratio of total benefits (a sum of all the outcomes) to total investments (a sum of all costs involved). The types of changes as well as value of changes (financial and non-financial) from the perspective of stakeholders will be measured to determine its social return on investment (SROI).

Research Objectives

The problem statement can be analysed through the following research objectives. The objectives of this study are:

- RO1) To determine the SROI for stakeholders (OUM, Prison Department, inmates, ex-inmates and their families).
- RO2) To assess whether prison inmates find tertiary education programmes offered in prison relevant to them.
- RO3) To evaluate the impact of offering tertiary education programmes in prison towards stakeholders (including university heads and tutors, prison heads, inmates, ex-inmates and their families).

Research Questions

- RQ1) What is the SROI for stakeholders (OUM, Prison Department, inmates and ex-inmates and their families)?
- RQ2) Are tertiary education programme offered in prison relevant to prison inmates?
- RQ3) What is the impact of offering tertiary education programme in prison towards stakeholders (including university heads and tutors, prison heads, inmates, ex-inmates, and their families)?

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Mandela Rules of Education and Recreation Rule 104, provision shall be made for the further education of all prisoners capable of profiting thereby, including religious instruction in the countries where this is possible. The education on illiterate prisoners and young prisoners shall be compulsory and special attention shall be paid to it by the prison administration.

So far as practicable, the education of prisoners shall be integrated with the educational system of the country so that after their release they may continue their education without difficulty. Based on National Education Policy of Malaysia, democratization of education policy is set by the Ministry of Education and “Education for All” as championed by UNESCO. As enshrined in regulations 151 (1) and (3), Prisons regulations 2000, educational services to inmates is an obligation which must be fulfilled by the prison authorities.

The Department of Justice in Malaysia is entrusted with the responsibility of maintaining justice according to the Malaysian constitution and legal system. Offenders of this system face legal action. They are tried under the legal system and if found guilty they are placed in prison to serve a term/sentence which depends on level of offence. The Department of Prisons is tasked with enforcing punitive measures prescribed for each prison inmate. In this process, prisoners are provided with accommodation, food, medical attention and other facilities for general upkeep that costs the government annual funds to manage a prison and maintain prison inmates.

This involves:

- (a) Compensation, benefits and rewards to all prison employees, police force and Department of Justice personnel.
- (b) Expenses covering accommodation, food, medical facilities, uniform and related items used by prisoners.
- (c) Utility expenses for the entire prison system.
- (d) Cost of administration and recordkeeping.
- (e) Transport cost.
- (f) Cost of psychiatric help and welfare of inmates.
- (g) Religion and related activities.
- (h) Cost of security provision (24/7, 365 days a year)

When prison inmates are released, they return back to society. If they are unable to secure a legally valid and reliable livelihood, there is a high possibility that they may return to a life of crime. In this case, they will be rearrested and placed in prison.

The objective of enforcing punitive action is to deter offenders from repeating offences and returning to a life of crime. However, prison inmates who are unable to secure proper employment or a means of living after release often return to a life of crime. They later become prison inmates as repeat offenders. This has evolved into a vicious cycle. In order to reduce the number of repeat offenders, the government (through OUM) has started tertiary education programmes aimed at upskilling prison inmates and providing them with sufficient knowledge so that they may be better equipped to secure proper employment or become entrepreneurs. This enables them to seek a legally permissible livelihood for themselves and their family. Education benefits individuals impacted by incarceration, and that makes society safer. By allowing people who want to turn their lives around the opportunity to do so, we all profit (Kunen, 2017). It may serve to reduce repeat offenders. If so, the financial strain of operating and maintaining a prison and associated legal personnel can be significantly reduced. While investing in prison education programmes will require upfront funding, the long-term economic benefits for states and localities are considerable as for every dollar (USD) spent on prison education, taxpayers are estimated to save four to five dollars (USD) that have been spent on incarceration (Bender, 2018). This is because when the inmates (or ex-inmates) have the academic qualification, they are to be competitive in the job market and this will spur economic activity and productivity.

Figure 1 depicts the unique partnership between OUM and the Malaysian Prisons Department. It provides a greater understanding of how change can be created by working closely through formal arrangement in which both parties cooperate to share skills, learning material, technology and other resources. This strategic and innovative partnership leverages on the principles of lifelong learning. Lasting partnership is aspired to be achieved later through collaborations with a range of extraordinary partners, including the local communities, business conglomerates and individual donors.

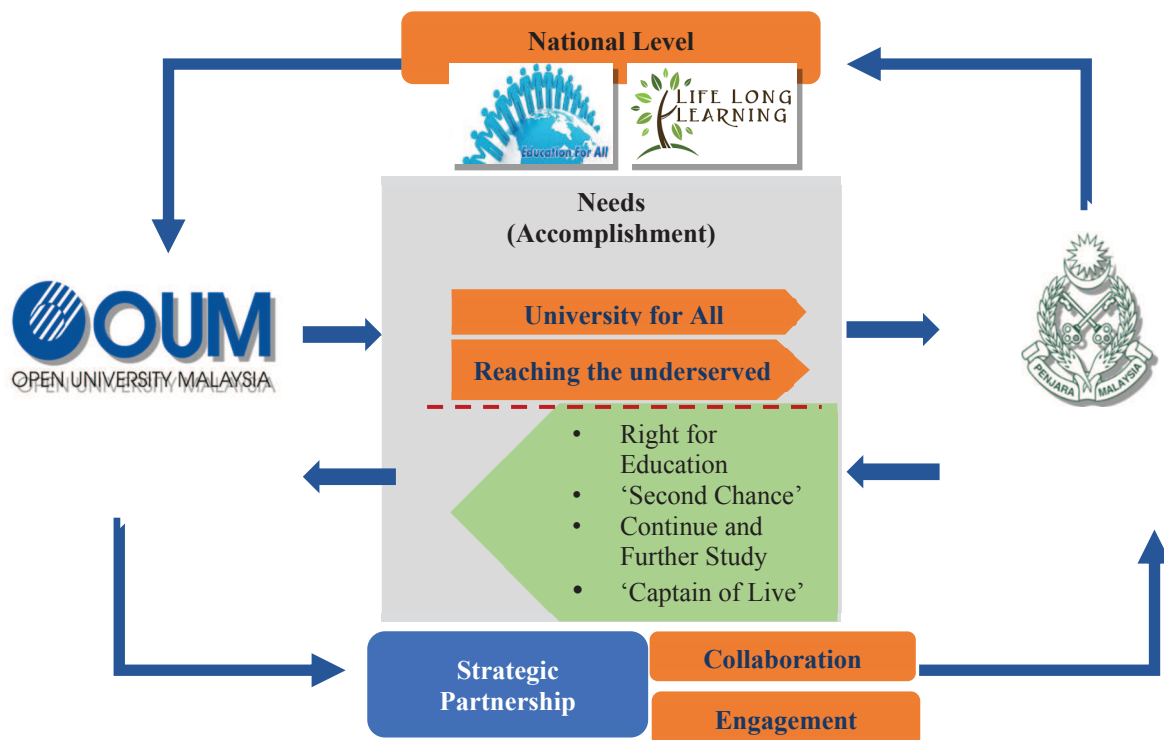


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Partnership between OUM and the Malaysian Prisons Department

This study seeks to measure the social return on investing in tertiary education for prison inmates. It seeks to analyse the benefits and costs of operating tertiary education programme in prison. It seeks to evaluate the effectiveness of tertiary education programmes in prisons in Malaysia through the Social Return on Investment (SROI). SROI is a method for measuring and communicating value based on 2015 MIM-KAS University Corporate Social Responsibility Programme Manual from Malaysian Institute of Management (MIM) in alliance with Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) that incorporates social, environmental and economic impacts to stakeholders. It is an accounting of value created by the activities and the contributions that made the activity possible. SROI has been the selected form of measurement as it enables this research to achieve an enhanced evaluation of effectiveness. It provides a greater understanding of how change can be created by evaluating social, environmental and economic outcomes. It generates a ratio of total benefits (a sum of all the outcomes) to total investments.

The SROI analysis is useful for strategic planning. It provides information for all stakeholders. It serves as a method of assessing the performance of an investment against its objectives. SROI reveals the legible financial and non-financial benefits as well as less legible opportunity costs (if tertiary education was not provided to prison inmates) so that investors/fund providers may obtain a holistic view and enhanced understanding about the value of providing tertiary education programme in prisons.

METHODOLOGY

The research design enables the researchers to come up with solutions to the problems and guides the researchers in the various stages of the research. In this research the cross-sectional design type is chosen. This is the most predominant design used in social sciences. Data will be collected by a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative method comprises questionnaires and the qualitative method comprises interviews to respondents (including inmates, ex-inmates, their families, prison heads, university heads and tutors). As such the study will utilise triangulation methods.

In this research the sampling design uses cluster sampling under probability sampling technique. This cluster sampling is to ensure that different groups in the population are adequately represented in the sample to increase their level of accuracy when estimating the parameters. The main idea in cluster sampling is to use available information on the population 'to divide it into groups such as the elements within each group are more alike than are the elements in the population as a whole' (Nachmias & Nachmias, 1996). A total of 68 inmates have registered for OUM programmes since 2008. From this number, 12 have successfully graduated, where a few of them continued their studies to higher levels. 20 students decided to be dormant and stopped pursuing their studies and 2 have quit. Programmes pursued are the Diploma in Management (DIM), Bachelor in Business Administration (Hons) (BBA), Bachelor of Political Science (BPS), Bachelor in Information Technology (Hons) (BIT), Masters in Business Administration (MBA) and Doctor of Philosophy in Business Administration (PhD BA). The selected prisons are in Kajang in the state of Selangor, Bentong in the state of Pahang and Kota Kinabalu in Sabah.

The breakdown is as follows:

- (a) 32 active learners (of which 3 are former graduates) and 9 graduates and 17 dormant learners and 2 learners who quit from Kajang Prison.

They consist of DIM, BBA, BPS, BIT, MBA and PhD BA learners and graduates.

- (b) 1 active learner from Bentong Prison in the BBA programme (Incidentally the only female learner).

- (c) 3 active and 3 dormant learners from Kota Kinabalu Prison in the DIM programme.

The research instrument is a cross-sectional self-administrated questionnaire which will be distributed to the respondents in the form of survey from April-July 2019 using scale points. This research also uses structured interview as a method to obtain accurate and maximum amount of information from the participants which can be otherwise unavailable. An interview is a purposeful exchange of ideas, the answering of questions and a 'conversation with a purpose'. Structured interview assists the interviewer to follow a predetermined agenda or questions. This research will seek MIM-KAS's Dr. Geoffrey Williams to review the reliability and validity of the research instruments and to appraise the research outcomes. Dr. Williams has been instrumental in crafting meaningful policies and promoting CSR strategies via MIM-KAS collaborations in Malaysia.

Data will be processed using the formula $\text{Benefits/Cost} = \text{Value of SROI}$ to answer to Research Objective 1. The results will be shown in the form of a ratio of benefits and costs in the operation of this programme. Descriptive analysis and tabulation will be utilised to generate the results for Research Objective 2 and Research Objective 3.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from this study seek to benefit various stakeholder groups. The government of Malaysia, Department of Justice and Department of Prisons will gain better understanding about the benefit of offering tertiary education in prison. The financial (costs and benefits in monetary terms) and non-financial costs saved (opportunity cost, reduction of workload of existing staff, reduction of cost of recruitment and selection of prospective staff, reduction of anxiety and work related stress, tax savings etc.) will be clearly depicted.

Expected results of this study will benefit prison inmates and former prisoners with a better understanding of how tertiary education and learning skills acquired help them continue further in life with a better standard of living. The tertiary education provided in prison is free and prison inmates receive additional skills (all paid for by the government) such as computer application skills, writing skills, study method skills and competency skills. They gain stronger self-confidence and motivation. Prison inmates receive knowledge which is instrumental in gaining employment at a later stage. The families of prison inmates also benefit from tertiary education in prison as the released inmate is equipped with knowledge to attain better employment and higher salaries. The income generated benefits the whole family (spouse, children, parents and other dependents) and provides higher purchasing power. This economic value stretches through many layers of society and a portion of it accrues back to the government in the form of tax payment.

Lastly, the findings from this study will benefit the academic staff and non-academic staff at OUM who have been instrumental in providing tertiary education to prison inmates. The demands for tertiary education in prisons have generated employment, work opportunities and improvement to open and distance learning programmes. As a result, OUM is able to constantly monitor and upgrade their tertiary education programmes and play a vital role in human capital development. Tertiary education by OUM staff can help transform prison inmates into skilled human capital who are competent and able to contribute to the economy. Tertiary education can successfully achieve greater benefits in positively transforming minds of prison inmates in addition to laws, regulation and punitive measures.

CONCLUSION

This study benefits society at large by being instrumental in transforming prison inmates into law abiding citizens who are better able to serve the economy as educated professionals. Members of the public can face less fear, less offences, less stress and anxiety of confronting repeat offenders. The higher level of safety in the environment will benefit many layers of society. Ideally, SROI value should lead to higher levels of confidence and better acceptance of released inmates back in society.

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